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COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
**COUNTY OF FAIRFAX**



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LEE DISTRICT SUPERVISOR

## **Joint Board Matter**

**Chairman Sharon Bulova**  
**Supervisor Jeffrey C. McKay**

**February 23, 2010**

While the mountains of snow have diminished somewhat, the effects of snowmaggadon will be with us for some time yet to come. These storms and their aftermath have also given us insight into what happens in an emergency and what it means to be prepared. We had a powerful illustration of government performing its primary function—keeping us safe and able to move around. We saw citizens working together in their neighborhoods, looking after their neighbors, and lending a hand with a shovel or snow blower. We saw the private sector pitch in and generously offer housing, food, and equipment to our public safety and facilities personnel. In my own district, I'd like to thank the many individuals, organizations, and businesses that helped out. (A list is attached.)

There are valuable lessons to be learned from these extraordinary storms and so we have scheduled a Snow Summit/Transportation Committee meeting for March 16 in the Board auditorium from 3:30 to 5:30 pm. This will take the place of the Transportation Committee meeting that had been scheduled for that date.

The purpose of this meeting is to assess both what worked well and what did not at the state—Virginia Department of Transportation—and County level. The lessons learned from this summit will be invaluable not only for the next snow storm, but for any emergency be it natural or man-made. Our agenda will include a report on what took place, what worked well and what did not, as well as suggestions and plans to address deficiencies that we identify.

We encourage Board members, County agencies, and citizens to report problems and issues to our Office of Public Affairs in advance of this meeting and request that our Office of Public Affairs provide these comments to the summit presenters. This will allow staff and presenters to be prepared to address issues at the summit.

The snow summit will include the Virginia Department of Transportation, the County's public safety agencies, Fairfax County Public Schools, County Facilities Management,

and the public information officers for the above agencies. A draft agenda is attached. I have also attached my own comments and observations.

We will be inviting our Northern Virginia Delegation to attend and participate, as well. The summit will be televised by Channel 16.

### **Comments for Transportation Committee Meeting**

While the mountains of snow have diminished somewhat, the effects of snowmaggadon are still with us. We will have a special meeting Snow Summit/After Action Report on March 16 to discuss what worked—and what didn't—during the three January and February snow storms. In the meantime, I'd like to highlight some points for us to consider.

- These back-to-back storms underline the importance of government services and illustrate a key point: there isn't a free lunch with no calories out there. While we rely on VDOT to maintain our roads, the general assembly has gone on a multi-year VDOT budget slashing tear. Yet, everyone is surprised when VDOT drops the ball—or the snowplow. We rely on government services to keep us safe and to keep residents and business alike able to get to where they need to go.
- County employees have gone above and beyond to keep government running and help citizens during these difficult and dangerous times. My own staff has worked 'round the clock to coordinate with VDOT, working from home when the County was closed or when they, themselves, could not get out of their neighborhoods. I know that's the case for everyone of my colleagues' staff too.
- These storms and their aftermath have also given us some realtime insights into what happens in an emergency and what it means to be prepared. This emergency was an act of god; it could just as well have been an act of man. All things considered, we got off lightly—think of floods, earthquakes—but we learned firsthand about the need to be self reliant for several days.

I'd also like to make some preliminary observations about VDOT and the County's handling of these storms.

- Based on the calls and emails I've received, there seems to be a disconnect in how VDOT approached neighborhoods. Many of the complaints indicated that neighboring streets in a community were plowed while others weren't. Hills and dangerous conditions didn't seem to be a priority.
- Residents were left wondering if their streets had been abandoned by VDOT. For example, a caller to my office related that a plow drove up, the driver got out, assessed the situation, said he couldn't handle it, and drove off.

- Plow drivers created walls of snow that blocked driveways. While this is always a problem, given the quantity of snow this time, it was particularly serious for senior citizens who can't dig out an 8-foot mountain of packed snow and who worry about medical emergencies.
- Many streets did not see a plow or sand in spite of numerous calls from residents, as well as from my office. VDOT did not seem to have a handle on what streets had been completed nor did repeated calls about the same street trigger any management review.
- While VDOT continued to publicize the number to call to report unplowed streets yesterday, that number was often impossible to reach. It rang off the hook or callers got a recording—VDOT reading its most recent press release. Callers hanging on long enough to get to the end heard a recording that they could leave a message or press 4 in case of an emergency.
- On the County side, we saw parks and fields plowed early on while other county facilities and schools struggled to find enough equipment and manpower to clear their sidewalks and parking lots. I ask if the County Executive has the authority to prioritize the use of resources. It simply makes no sense to plow the entrance to a golf course—that cannot possibly be used—while more critical facilities are wanting.
- This storm was not a surprise—it was on everyone's radar for at least a week. The circumstances were extraordinary but the planning was not.

### **Lee District Businesses That Generously Contributed to Snow Clearing Efforts**

- Springfield Hilton
- Springfield Mall
- TownPlace Suites by Marriott
- HoneyBaked Ham Company
- Noodles
- Malek's Pizza Palace
- Popeye's
- Papa John's
- Red, Hot @ Blue
- Manchester Bagels

- 7 Eleven
- Dunkin Doughnuts
- Belmont Power Equipment